

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Sunday after Ascension Day¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirtieth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.

“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.⁴

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo [**KNEE-bow**], to the top of Pisgah [**PIZZ-gah**], that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed [**SHOWD**] him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, And all Naph-tali [**NAFF-tuh-lye**], and the land of Ephraim [**EE-frih-em**], and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea,

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Let us pray:

Eternal God, our Heavenly Father, help us to develop patience, and the wisdom to realize those things which we do not and cannot now know. Lead us to examine in all things Your Word and Your guidance. Endue us with the humility to recognize our shortcomings and to seek always to model ourselves and our lives after Your will. This we ask in the name of Your most blessed Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

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May 6, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on the Fourth Sunday after Easter, 2012.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 38 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (CIPBC 1963).

³ Deuteronomy 30:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Deuteronomy 34:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 65:17-end (KJV).

⁶ St. John 16:5-end (KJV).

⁷ St. John 16:7-12 (KJV).

⁸ St. John 16:7 (KJV).

⁹ St. John 16:7b (KJV).

¹⁰ St. John 7:39 (KJV).

¹¹ St. John 16:8b (KJV).

¹² Acts 2:22 (KJV).

¹³ St. John 16:12 (KJV).

¹⁴ *A Prayer of St. Chrysostom*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 80, 89 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 19 (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 26 (CIPBC 1963).

And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar [**ZOE-urr**]. And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.

“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor [**beth-PEA-are**]: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

“And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

“And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

“And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.

“And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed [**SHOWD**] in the sight of all Israel.”

Or,

Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the sixty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁵

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old

man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith [SETH] the LORD."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁶

"... But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew [SHOW] you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of

And finally, our Lord promises us that there is far, far more for us to learn, to experience, to understand through Him. Along with that promise comes the caution that we will have to wait. Like the child waiting for Christmas, like the beginning student who wants to play the advanced piece of music before thoroughly understanding the basics, we need to wait until we are ready to understand, to comprehend, to accept the things our Lord has in store for us.

In that regard, we are much like the original disciples were. We want to understand God's plan. We want to know what will happen, what the future holds. We want to know the how, and the why, but mostly the when. But God's messenger tells us, "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*"¹³

God knows what we are ready for. More than that, He knows what is best for us. That is why in the Prayer of St. Chrysostom we pray, "*Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them.*"¹⁴ We recognize—at least in this prayer—that we often do not know what is best for us. We ask for things that are not in our best interests. We sometimes pray foolishly, or in ignorance.

We therefore ask God to grant those things that are the best for us – as only He knows. We must come to realize that those things may not be what we ask, and may not be when or how we ask. We must – as God's children – learn patience and trust in Him.

As in so many things in the human experience – we have to forgo our human desires for the longer-term good. In fact, the whole concept of human life on this earth as a preparation for life in eternity, of growing into people who will be with God in Heaven, is the one most immense and overwhelmingly important example of that principle that we spoke of before: that of the ability to delay gratification as a direct consequence of gaining increased maturity.

If our Lord had not experienced the Resurrection, then there would have been no need for the Holy Spirit to comfort, to uphold, and to teach, as there would be no good news of salvation for Christians to spread and share. Until Jesus went away, the Holy Spirit “*was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified,*” as Saint John tells us.¹⁰ So the Holy Spirit was to come after the Resurrection of Jesus, at the direction of the Godhead, in order to perform a three-fold mission. That mission, according to St. John, is to “*reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*”.¹¹

The reproof of sin is focused on those who reject Christ and His message, especially on those who hated and persecuted Him. That reproof is intended to bring change, to convince people of the need to change and to come to faith in Him, the one and only Savior of the world. The Holy Spirit is also to reprove the claims of those who claimed that Jesus was wicked, a sinner, and that He was in league with the devil. To counter these claims, Jesus notes that He is going to the Father. This He could not do if He were evil.

And, as St. Peter declared in his Pentecost sermon to the populace of Jerusalem, “*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know...*”¹² In order to perform the tasks He accomplished, our Lord was clearly innocent of the charges laid against Him by the Jews. In order to achieve salvation of His people, Jesus was obviously in obedience to God’s Law. That law required death, and was fulfilled by Jesus in His own death on the Cross.

The Holy Spirit is to reprove judgment because our Lord will serve as judge of the world, of all of us, and most especially of Satan, the prince of this world. That judgment is sure, and the one salvation from that judgment is faith in the Lord.

mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith [SETH], A little while? we cannot tell what he saith [SETH]. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew [SHOW] you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye

might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not way, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”*⁷ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Homily:

In the human experience, it is often the case that we must forgo our immediate natural desires in order to obtain some longer-term good. When we are young children, we must learn the virtue of patience as we learn to wait for gratification. We must also learn that we cannot have everything we want regardless of the consequences. People who work in mental health call this “learning delayed gratification”. The degree to which one has internalized this lesson is an important index of one’s overall maturity.

How many parents remember telling their children that they could have some special treat later, but not now? Every parent knows the trembling lip, tearful eyes and quavering voice of the child coming to grips with putting off what they want for the time being in order to earn a greater good later.

This is the lesson our Lord was teaching His disciples in today’s Gospel reading. As Jesus’ time on Earth neared its end,

He sought to get His disciples to take the longer-term view. Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that rather than being sad because He was leaving them for a time, they needed to focus on the far greater benefits they would see in the future: *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”*⁸

As hard as it was for the disciples to see beyond Jesus’ temporary absence, there was a greater benefit to them if He did go. The disciples were shaken to their core by the very idea that their Lord would leave them, even temporarily. We often share this doubt and question of the Apostles’ and we ask “Why did Jesus have to die?” It is only on more mature reflection that we remember that He died for us, to save us. From our perspective it is hard to understand why our Lord would chose to go through human death—especially the horrifyingly painful death on the Cross—for our benefit.

Our Lord was willing to undergo all this for us because He loves us. By enduring His Passion, our Lord saved us from having to undergo the wrath and vengeance of God in retribution for our sins. That is why Jesus says it is expedient for us that He goes away.

For us, it is best that He does so, even if that is not what we might want at the moment. It is by His going away—that death on the Cross—that He saved us from eternal death and destruction. It is by His dying that Jesus defeats death and the grave, and not only for Himself, but for us also.

Further, Jesus obtains for us forgiveness of our sins, reconciliation with the Father, and eternal life. Had He instead chosen to stay with His disciples on Earth rather than going to the Father, Jesus says, the results would be catastrophic for mankind: *“[F]or if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him to you.”*⁹